



Jeff Wright
Mayor

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

MINUTES

NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

March 17, 2010

Audio verbatim transcript of meeting available in Town Clerk's Office

Mayor Wright called the Special Meeting of the Town Council to order at 7:04 p.m. in the Helen Nelson Room, Town Hall.

I PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II ROLL CALL

Councilors Present

Councilor Banach
Councilor Casasanta
Councilor Cohen
Councilor McBride
Councilor Lenares
Councilor Nasinnyk
Mayor Wright

Councilors Absent

Councilor Klett
Councilor Nagel

Staff Present

John Salomone, Town Manager
Jaime Trevethan, Executive Assistant
Ann Harter, Director of Finance
Lisa Rydecki, Deputy Finance Director
Ken Freidenberg, Director of Human Services
Richard Mulhall, Chief of Police
Roxanne Verbridge, Administrative Asst. to the Chief
Chris Schroeder, Fire Marshal/Fire Chief

III PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – ON AGENDA

Pam Austin, 105 Old Farm Drive: Ms. Austin indicated that she is the president of Newington Midget Football, and spoke in favor of installing an artificial turf field at Clem Lemire. She stated that the youth need a quality venue to practice and play sports, and noted that the football side

of the Clem Lemire complex is in disrepair, despite the best efforts of the Parks and Grounds department. She noted the heavy use of the complex, especially from August through December, and remarked that the Town acceptance and appropriation of the grant funding for the project is imperative to the continuing success of the program. Ms. Austin cautioned that the Town may lose the grant funding if it is not accepted.

Jay Bottalico, 37 Valley View Drive: Mr. Bottalico remarked that the Town Manager's proposed budget increase for the Board of Education of 3% is too high and stated that the Council should bring the increase down to zero-percent. He remarked that the surplus remaining from last year indicates that residents were overtaxed last year. Mr. Bottalico noted expected teacher salary increases of 6% though 10% and commented that such increases are ridiculous. He stated that the blame should not be placed on the teachers; rather it should be placed on the Board of Education for accepting the contract. Mr. Bottalico also commented that there are two Councilors who should abstain voting on the budget due to a conflict of interest and indicated that he would speak to the Town Attorney on the matter.

Peter Gajowiak, 60 Pickens Drive: Mr. Gajowiak indicated that he is the president of Newington Lacrosse, and he spoke in favor of accepting the grant funding and installing an artificial turf field. He indicated that there are 30-40 lacrosse games held per week during the season, and indicated that the current field at the Clem Lemire complex is in disrepair. He noted that while the Town's budget may be shrinking the popularity and usage of the field will be growing, and also noted concerns about maintenance and repair costs of the current field. He noted that other area towns have a turf field and expressed concern that the Town is falling behind. Mr. Gajowiak noted that this is not a new concept and urged the Council not to delay the project, as doing so may result in an increased cost to do the project down in the future.

Jeff Hedberg, 120 Northwood Road: Mr. Hedberg noted that a turf field was a top item of discussion and part of the Parks and Recreation master plan five or six years ago. He noted that artificial turf would eliminate the problem of cutting grass, especially during rainy periods, and would also allow more play time despite inclement weather conditions. He also noted that there are currently several groups that vie for field time and stated that installing a turf field would help alleviate scheduling concerns. He noted the availability of the \$500,000 grant and remarked that this would be the time to do the project while people need the work and project bids will be low. Mr. Hedberg cautioned that waiting two to three years will likely result in higher labor costs to complete the project, and he asked the Council to call him with any questions.

Neil Forte, 123 Church Street: Mr. Forte stated that the discussion should be about the kids. He noted that he has served on the Newington Soccer and Parks and Recreation boards and stated that a turf field would be a benefit for all sports and all children. He noted that there are more active sports teams than there were in the past and stated that a turf field will help reduce concerns about scheduling and bad weather. Mr. Forte also noted that the upkeep of the turf over the long run is less expensive as it requires little maintenance.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive: Ms. Lyons noted a lengthy discussion about the grant and turf field at the Council's January 27, 2009 meeting and urged the Council to go back and read the minutes for a refresher of the discussion. She indicated that she has several questions regarding the project: How much funding would the Town have to contribute above the grant? What is the lifespan of the turf? Are there safety issues with artificial turf? She stated that she is not against athletics, but indicated that she would rather any extra funding go towards the Police or Fire Department.

Mady Kenny, 53 Crestview Drive: Mrs. Kenny noted that there are two sides to every issue. She urged the Council to practice careful consideration on several points of the turf project. She indicated that she had several questions regarding the project: Where did the estimate for the project cost come from? How long until the turf field presents a savings to the Town? What is the proposed square footage of the field, and what is its life span? She noted studies that indicate that there can be up to a 37-degree difference between air and turf temperature, and remarked that it could be a health concern, and also expressed concerns about static, carcinogenics and the environmental impact of artificial turf. She also inquired whether the Town is in the position to make this investment even with the grant.

IV CONSIDERATION OF NEW BUSINESS

A Budget Review – Human Services: Ken Freidenberg, Director

The Council reviewed the Human Services budget with Mr. Freidenberg. He indicated that there is little change in the Human Services Department budget other than a slight adjustment in Consultant/Special Contractors for additional clinical therapist services, a cost which is offset in other areas. Councilor Cohen inquired whether the flat level of staffing will present a problem due to increased demand on the department in this economy. Mr. Freidenberg replied that while it has been a challenge the department is holding its own, and he thanked the public for its generous response to increased need with the food bank, holiday program, etc. The Council discussed the various services offered by the department, including youth services and the Juvenile Review Board, as well as the various fundraising efforts put on by the department.

B Budget Review – Public Safety (Fire, Police, Street Lighting, Emergency Management, EMS): Fire Marshal/Chief Schroeder, Asst. Chief Tom Lapierre, Fire Commissioners Seiler and Bogacz.

Fire Department:

Chief Schroeder indicated that volunteer membership is currently at 130, up from fewer than 100 two years ago. Town Manager Salomone stated that the increases in the Fire Department's budget are to cover costs associated with increased volunteerism, including training, technical supplies and equipment costs, much of which is required by the State. Commissioner Seiler noted that the term "fringe benefits" in section 232 is misleading and noted that this is a volunteer fire department – the members may be partially reimbursed for some costs, but they are not paid.

The Council discussed the increase in volunteerism, as well as the costs associated with training and equipment replacement requirements. Several Councilors expressed concern that the proposed increases in the budget may not be enough to cover the costs associated with the increased membership. Chief Schroeder noted that the Town has applied for a grant to cover some of the equipment costs.

Town Manager Salomone also noted that there is an increase of about \$16,000 for facilities maintenance not covered by the Facilities department, including repairs and projects in the various fire stations. Chief Schroeder indicated that the projects include furniture, kitchen cabinets and other similar items.

Police Department: Chief Richard Mulhall and Roxanne Verbridge, Admin. Asst.

Town Manager Salomone indicated that he reluctantly kept staffing even with last year, despite a request for additional staffing to “right size” the department. Mayor Wright noted that traffic violations have increased from 7700 in 2008 to 9683 in 2009. Chief Mulhall stated that the NPD has made an effort to increase traffic enforcement, and indicated that there has been a decrease in motor vehicle accidents as well.

The Council discussed staffing in the Department, including overtime costs which have been trending down in total across the various divisions of the Department. The Council also discussed the start-up cost of hiring and training a new officer, and the impact staffing levels have on overtime costs. Chief Mulhall indicated that there have been substantial changes to the number and types of investigations over the past few years, and as a result the Patrol Division has had to take over some of the cases that cannot be handled by the Detective Division due to its substantially increased workload. Councilor Banach requested that the Chief keep the Council advised of the staffing and caseload situation.

Town Manager Salomone noted a decrease in the Police Vehicles fund and stated that although the proposed budget calls for three new patrol cars, some of the current equipment will be refitted into the newly purchased cars, resulting in a decrease of \$6,400 from last year’s budget.

Other Public Safety

Town Manager Salomone indicated that the Street Lighting budget item decreased by \$40,000; a fine-tuning brought about as a result of an audit.

Town Manager Salomone indicated that the \$8,575 decrease in the Emergency Medical Service budget item is due to a transfer to the Volunteer Ambulance Fund.

C Budget Review: Health

Town Manager Salomone indicated that the health budget reflects Newington’s share on a per capita basis for being a member of the Central Connecticut Health District, and stated that the Town’s cost share hasn’t changed in FY 2010-11

D Budget Review: CIP: CIP Committee members Steve Woods and Dan Carson

Councilor Nasinnyk, Chair of the CIP Committee gave an overview of the CIP process as well as the Committee’s recommendations to the Council, including some funding for a portion of the Town Hall lower level renovations and funding for school projects. She expressed disappointment that the canopy at the Senior Center could not be included in the budget.

The Council discussed the artificial turf field project at length. Councilor Nasinnyk indicated that the CIP Committee suggests taking advantage of the \$500,000 grant funds to begin the planning phase of the project, and noted the Town Manager’s recommendation of not utilizing Town funds for the project in FY 2010-11. The Council discussed costs involved with the project, as well as the safety and longevity of the turf. They also discussed the timing of the project, as well as the availability of the grant funding. Mayor Wright cautioned that this is a vulnerable grant and urged the Council to move forward with the project so as not to risk losing the funding. Mr. Woods noted that it is the consensus of the CIP Committee to utilize the grant

for the preliminary stages of the project, but to fund the Town's portion over the next two fiscal years.

The Council discussed other CIP projects such as the Fenn Road access road, Market Square improvements and school code compliance. Mayor Wright noted that a significant portion of the CIP funding will go towards school projects, but noted that the State provides reimbursement for a portion of many school code compliance projects. He also noted that although the total proposed CIP budget is due to increase, these State reimbursements will offset the difference and there will be no net increase to the taxpayers.

E Debt Service

Mayor Wright noted that the Town is in the process of refunding some of its bonds, and stated that this will lower some of the Town's interest costs. He noted that the Town's outstanding debt ratio is low relative to other area communities and suggested that some of the Town's capital needs be addressed through bonding.

F Equipment Reserve

The Council discussed the equipment reserve fund. Mayor Wright noted the heavy equipment schedule of replacement and inquired whether some equipment can be utilized longer than indicated on the depreciation schedule. Town Manager Salomone stated that the equipment is utilized for as much of its useful life as possible. The Council discussed the replacement schedule, noting safety issues and depreciation. Councilor Cohen noted that the system was derived by former Town Manager Chapman and it has always been a successful system.

V PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – ON AGENDA

Jay Bottalico, 37 Valley View Drive: Mr. Bottalico stated that the turf field quote of \$1.6 million is too high, indicated that this is not the official quote and inquired from where the quote was obtained.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive: Ms. Lyons urged the Council to be careful when prioritizing the CIP budget and to give consideration to smaller projects, especially those involving safety concerns, such as the stairs at Mill Pond. She asked the Council to have a dialogue of the pros and cons of an artificial turf field prior to moving forward.

Fred Morris, 702 Jacobs Lane: Mr. Morris indicated that he is a Midget Football coach and he asked the Council to put themselves in the children's shoes, and to think about the joy of playing on a turf field in another town only to come back to Newington and be disappointed by the Town's muddy fields. He stated that he moved to Town eight years ago due to its excellent education and athletic facilities and he urged the Council to upgrade the field so that the Town can maintain its tradition of excellence.

Mady Kenny, 53 Crestview Drive: Mrs. Kenny recalled her days of playing sports in New York City and remarked that this is an era of entitlement. She stated that just because other towns have a turf field that doesn't mean Newington should have one too if we can't afford it.

VI REMARKS BY COUNCILORS

Councilor McBride noted that as a former athlete at Newington High school and as a basketball coach he can appreciate all aspects of this discussion.

Councilor Cohen asked the Council to keep in mind then when something is added to the budget it means that either something is taken away elsewhere or that the mill rate will be increased.

Councilor Nasinnyk noted that she and Councilor Cohen attended an award ceremony for the Newington Volunteer Ambulance and she congratulated the award recipients.

Councilor Banach noted that this is the time for residents to come out to express their opinions on the Town Manager's proposed budget, and noted that the Council will be making decisions on the budget in the next several weeks.

Councilor Casasanta expressed concern about losing the grant money for the turf field if the Town does not move forward with the project.

Deputy Mayor Lenares spoke in favor of the turf field, and with moving forward with the project when possible.

Mayor Wright noted safety concerns about the turf field and stated that as a father he would not even think about bring the project forward if he felt there were any serious safety concerns.

VII ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn meeting was made at 9:17 p.m. by Councilor Banach, and seconded by Councilor Nasinnyk. Motion passed 7-0 (Councilors Klett and Nagel Absent).

Respectfully Submitted

Mrs. Jaime Trevethan
Executive Assistant to the Town Manager

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